

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 291

By Byrd

A RESOLUTION to urge Congress to reform federal requirements relative to high school graduation rates.

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee is recognized as a national leader in school accountability and school reform, seeing record improvements in academic attainment while focusing on providing a quality education for every child; and

WHEREAS, since 2010, states have been required by the federal government to use a uniform method of calculating graduation rates called the adjusted cohort graduation rate, which measures the number of students from an original cohort who graduate in four years with a regular diploma; and

WHEREAS, among its punitive requirements, this calculation mandates the addition of students who transfer into the cohort regardless of length of attendance, unfairly making a school responsible for those students who possibly could be enrolled for less than a month and who may be academically ineligible for graduation, having fallen behind at another school, with no time for the receiving school to help the student catch up to the student's peers; and

WHEREAS, this unfair federal mandate also requires the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities educated in comprehensive development classrooms, who have never had an individual education plan (IEP) that included obtaining a regular diploma as an objective, thus significantly impacting and reducing the overall graduation rate of the school they attend; and

WHEREAS, under this formula, schools are also further punished and held accountable by the requirement that those students who quit school at the age of eighteen be counted as dropouts, regardless of the fact that they have reached the age of majority and are no longer

subject to the compulsory school attendance law in Tennessee, meaning neither the courts, the school, nor their parents can compel them to attend; and

WHEREAS, additionally this calculation set by the United States Department of Education egregiously prohibits schools from counting as graduates those students who leave school and successfully obtain their GED® or HiSET® in direct contrast to the United States Department of Defense and other federal agencies that recognize a GED® or HiSET® as equivalent to a regular high school diploma; and

WHEREAS, it is time that the federal government address this onerous regulation during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and reform the graduation rate calculation requirements, returning both validity and accountability to the process and reverting oversight to state control; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby urge Congress to reform the federal requirements relative to high school graduation rates during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we hereby encourage Congress to change the adjusted cohort graduation rate to exempt from inclusion: those students who transfer to a school within 360 school days of graduation; those students with intellectual disabilities educated in comprehensive development classrooms; and those students who drop out of school at age eighteen.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we encourage Congress to further amend the adjusted cohort graduation rate calculations to include those students who drop out of school, but obtain a GED® or HiSET® within one year of the graduation date of their original cohort, and to extend the original cohort timeframe from four years to five years for completion of high school to obtain a regular diploma.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we hereby urge Congress to end the required use of a federally mandated graduation rate formula and return control of determining valid and accountable graduation rates to the states.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that appropriate copies of this resolution be prepared and transmitted to the President and Clerk of the United States Senate, the Speaker and Clerk of the United States House of Representatives, the entire Tennessee Congressional delegation, and the Secretary of the United States Department of Education.